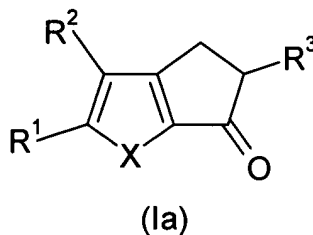
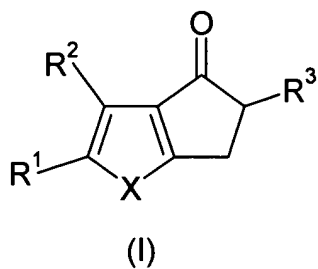
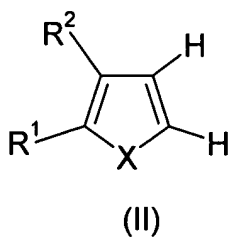


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

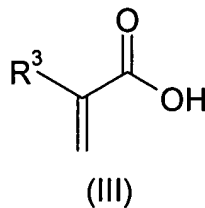
1. (currently amended) A process for preparing heterocyclic ketones of the formulae (I) or (Ia)



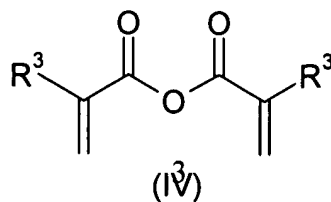
by reacting a heterocyclic compound of the formula (II)



with an α,β -unsaturated carboxylic acid of the formula (III)



or with its anhydride of the formula (IV)



which comprises performing the reaction in a liquid reaction medium which comprises at least one strong organic acid and at least one water absorbent, where the strong organic acid has a higher acid strength than the carboxylic acid of the formula (III) by adding simultaneously the heterocyclic compound of the formula (II) together with the α,β - unsaturated carboxylic acid of the formula (III) or together with its anhydride of the formula (IV) to said liquid reaction medium, and wherein the reaction is carried out in the temperature range from 50 to 110 °C, and

where

R¹ is hydrogen or a C₁-C₄₀ carbon-containing group,

R² is hydrogen or a C₁-C₄₀ carbon-containing group, or

R¹ and R² together form a cyclic ring system,

R³ is a C₁-C₄₀ carbon-containing group and

X is an element of the 16th group of the Periodic Table or is a divalent nitrogen group -(N-R⁴)-, where R⁴ is an electron-withdrawing radical which is selected from the group consisting of perhalogenated C₁-C₄₀ carbon-containing radicals and C₁-C₄₀ organosulfonyl groups.

2. (Original) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein X is sulfur.
3. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~claim 1 or 2~~ claim 1, wherein the strong organic acid is a C₁-C₈-alkylsulfonic acid.
4. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims 1 to 3~~ claim 1, wherein the water absorbent is phosphorus pentoxide.

5. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims 1 to 4~~ claim 1, wherein at least 50% by weight of the liquid reaction medium ~~is consists of~~ a mixture of methanesulfonic acid and phosphorus pentoxide.
6. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims 1 to 5~~ claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of the heterocyclic compound of the formula (II) to the α,β -unsaturated carboxylic acid of the formula (III) is in the range from 5 : 1 to 1 : 100.
7. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims 1 to 6~~ claim 1, wherein the mass ratio of the heterocyclic compound of the formula (II) to the liquid reaction medium is in the range from 1 : 2 to 1 : 1000.
8. (Currently amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims 1 to 7~~ claim 1, wherein the mass ratio of the water absorbent to the strong organic acid is in the range from 1 : 99 to 25 : 75.
9. cancelled
10. (New) A process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the strong organic acid is a C₁-C₈-alkylsulfonic acid.
11. (New) A process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the water absorbent is phosphorus pentoxide.
12. (New) A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein at least 50% by weight of the liquid reaction medium is a mixture of methanesulfonic acid and phosphorus pentoxide.
13. (New) A process as claimed in claim 12, wherein the molar ratio of the heterocyclic compound of the formula (II) to the α,β -unsaturated carboxylic acid of the formula (III) is in the range from 5 : 1 to 1 : 100.
14. (New) A process as claimed in claim 13, wherein the mass ratio of the heterocyclic compound of the formula (II) to the liquid reaction medium is in the range from 1 : 2 to 1 : 1000.

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15. (New) A process as claimed in claim 14, wherein the mass ratio of the water absorbent to the strong organic acid is in the range from 1 : 99 to 25 : 75.